

**DECISION NOTICE/  
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)**

**Longley Meadows Fish Habitat Enhancement Project  
Environmental Analysis**

USDA Forest Service  
Wallowa-Whitman National Forest  
La Grande Ranger District  
Union County, Oregon

An Environmental Assessment (EA) that discusses the proposed Longley Meadows Fish Enhancement Project within the 139-acre planning area on the La Grande Ranger District of the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest and adjacent State and private land is available for review at the La Grande Ranger District Office in La Grande, Oregon.

Approximately 111 acres of the project area are on National Forest System (NFS) lands, the remaining acres are on State (13 acres), and private (15 acres) land. The decision described in the Decision Notice is for the activities proposed on NFS lands. Agreements have been signed with the State, a private landowner, and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) permitting proposed project activities on State and private land within the project area. A separate letter and FONSI will be issued by the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) to document environmental compliance for all activities within the project area (including those on Jordan Creek Ranch and La Grande Rifle and Pistol Club lands).

**The Decision**

Based on the analysis described in the EA and associated project record, it is my decision to implement Alternative 2, as modified below, as the method of treatment and management of these NFS lands. This decision addresses the purpose and need to improve fish and aquatic habitat, address winter ice issues which will decrease erosion and fine sediment sources, improve floodplain function and connectivity, improve instream habitat (increase pool quality and quantity, fish cover, habitat complexity, spawning gravel recruitment), and improve riparian vegetation and future large wood recruitment potential.

Alternative 2 as modified below responds to issues related to aquatic and fish habitat, water quality, protection of cultural resources, and protection of adjacent State and private lands/infrastructure. The following describes the preferred alternative.

**Preferred Alternative Description:**

The following types of activities will occur on NFS lands within the Longley Meadows project area under Alternative 2:

- Improve channel geometry to reduce width-to-depth ratios through large wood placement, channel fill, and bar construction.
- Place large wood structures throughout the mainstem channel to provide habitat and channel control.
- Place floodplain wood and plant native shrubs to reduce overland velocities and trap ice.
- Increase channel/floodplain interactions by removing topographic features that inhibit overland flows.
- Increase connectivity of relic channel swales and enhance fish cover.
- Re-meander channel in appropriate locations to reconnect floodplains and existing swale networks while improving channel form and function.
- Improve alcove connectivity to mainstem and enhance fish cover.
- Enhance and protect existing functional juvenile fish rearing habitats.

- Improve connectivity of spring-fed side channels, wetlands, and alcoves to provide additional summer and winter rearing habitats.
- Plant native vegetation to improve riparian and floodplain conditions and to shade the stream.
- Reduce risk of erosion to highway embankments through strategic placement of log structure treatments and graded features.
- Enhance existing ponds and provide for additional beaver habitat.
- Enhance/create protective berms on private lands around the La Grande Rifle Club.
- Institute an area closure on NFS lands during construction activities to provide for public safety.

Based on extensive modeling and ground verification, the following modifications will be made to Alternative 2 to ensure achievement of project goals and protection of adjacent private and State lands/infrastructure (refer to Table 4 and attached modified Alternative 2 map for specifics):

1. A portion of the main channel (area between staging areas 4 and 5) near Highway 244 will be remeandered to increase abrupt 90-degree bends to create pool habitat, provide for more flow splits to create a depositional environment (and instream island), and redirect the return to the existing channel at more of an angle away from the highway. 300 feet of new side channel (SC 2A) will be constructed just north of the main channel remeander to reduce main channel flow speed and increase floodplain interaction.
2. The main channel near the La Grande Rifle and Pistol Club will remain in its current location and not be remeandered to ensure protection of the Club grounds and infrastructure during high flows. Approximately 345 feet of channel grading would connect existing channel features to create 900 feet of a new perennial side channel (SC 6) to increase interaction with the floodplain and provide quality side channel habitat. Side channels 8 and 8A will no longer be necessary due to this design change.
3. Side channel 2 (SC 2) objectives can be achieved with less excavation than originally planned resulting in approximately 550 feet less ground disturbance will not occur.
4. Side channel 3 (SC 3) has been combined with a portion of side channel 5 and renamed SC 3. This reduces excavation needs by approximately 400 feet while meeting objectives in this area.
5. Side channel 4 (SC 4) grading will be reduced to create a wide shallow swale and will not be a defined channel. This will encourage floodplain inundation and riparian recruitment while reducing the overall disturbance footprint.
6. Side channel 6 (SC 6) has been redesigned to be main channel flow split with an instream island to increase interaction with the floodplain.
7. Side channel 7 (SC 7) is now side channel 5 (SC 5), a perennial side channel with multiple 90 degree bends to create quality habitat. Side channels 5A, 5B, and 5C (total of approximately 600 feet) will be added to SC 5 (replacing MC A and B) to increase floodplain interaction and create pool habitat.
8. Side channels SC 9 and 10 and main channel C (MC C) will be dropped to enhance protection of the La Grande Rifle and Pistol Club.
9. Staging areas were reduced by approximately 4 acres and temporary access roads were increased by 0.4 miles limiting them, where possible, to areas where stream channel construction disturbance is planned.

Channel reconstruction will include both instream work (wood placement and fill) and extensive channel construction activities (refer to attached map for detailed activities and locations). New channel construction will be focused on relocating portions of the river channel to allow it to re-engage with several historical channel swales and desired pond features (see attached map). Large wood features will be added throughout the project. Additionally, selective removal of floodplain fill will be accomplished. Additional side channels and alcove features will be enhanced at historical channel meander scars and depressions throughout the floodplain area that may require additional excavation to meet grade.

Large wood features will be constructed with locally sourced logs from either the Jordan Creek Ranch sites covered under the Bird Track Springs analysis or purchased as a market commodity from private lands. Wood

structures are a combination of root wads, cut log boles, and slash material. Large wood structures will be embedded in the bed and banks of the channel and floodplain to provide stability and to resist hydraulic and ice forces. Logs will be trucked to the project site and stored in pre-established staging areas and then transported to their project locations by off-road dump truck or helicopter depending on site conditions and environmental concerns. Excavators will be used for large wood structure construction. Channel features will be re-graded or constructed to alter the existing width and depth consistent with project goals. Constructed channel features will include pools, riffles, and bars made from gravel and cobble sources from local project excavation. Channel features will be constructed to mimic natural river channel development. Floodplain features including side channels and alcoves will be re-shaped and wood strategically placed to improve connectivity with the mainstem of the river and enhance fish cover.

With the exception of logs, rocks, native seeds, and potted native plants, all materials utilized for the project would be from within the project site and re-purposed in construction of new channel features and floodplain elements. Existing boulder-rock weirs would be removed and boulders re-purposed as habitat features or structural ballast. Abandoned reaches of the existing channel would be filled utilizing excavated material from constructed channel segments. Existing riparian vegetation, topsoil, shrubs, and trees that require removal would be salvaged and re-used in the floodplain. At this time, it is not expected that any native materials would be removed from the project site. Non-native materials (trash, noxious weeds, etc.) would be removed if found during construction.

All areas disturbed by equipment would be re-vegetated with appropriate native potted plants, salvaged vegetation, and seeded with a native grass/forb seed mix after project completion. Mulch would be used in those areas where woody debris is not available for rehabilitation.

Short-term goals of the proposed action include protecting existing critical rearing and holding habitats within the reach and providing additional and immediate rearing and holding habitats for salmonids. Long-term goals are to re-establish natural processes to move the existing channel from a stagnant condition to a dynamic channel that interacts with its floodplain. Floodplain connectivity provides habitat for multiple species, flood control, and ice storage benefits. Long-term project goals also include providing cooler water within the reach through attenuation of daily heating with a mature and densely vegetated riparian floodplain, increased hyporheic connectivity, and heterogeneous habitat features.

### **Log Structures**

The following approximate amounts of logs and woody material will be used for instream structure construction:

- 25 – 22+ inch whole trees
- 22 – 22 to 30 inch trees with root wads
- 5 – 16 to 22 inch full tree
- 380 - 16 to 22 inch trees with root wads
- 140 – 16 to 22 inch trees without root wads
- 547 – 10 to 16 inch trees with root wads
- 2,128 – 10 to 16 inch trees without root wads
- 103 – tree tops
- 4,800 cubic yards of small trees and branches for racking materials.

Each structure site would vary between one to 40 pieces of large wood material (LWM) with additional wood racking and slash material. Large wood would be approximately 20 to 40 feet long.

The woody material taken from the 1,059 acre Jordan Creek Ranch site (reviewed and approved under the Bird Track Springs Fish Enhancement Project Environmental Assessment and BPA Decision Notice, 2017 – refer to map in Appendix A) will be pushed over by an excavator or felled with a chainsaw. All of

the wood will be imported into the project with the use of an excavator and chokers, where needed. Each wood structure will have key structural members buried into the riverbed and/or banks or ballasted with alluvial material/boulders to provide structural stability to withstand hydraulic forces in accordance with a risk-based design. Additional pool excavation will occur at most in-channel structure sites as depicted in detailed grading plans.

Large wood materials will be purchased as needed under a competitive market commodities contract from non-public lands. These trees would be trucked to the project area and unloaded in staging areas identified in the map attached to this Decision. Target trees purchased under contract and those removed from the Jordan Creek Ranch area would be harvested within 1 to 3 months of project construction in order to install the large wood structures before the wood becomes dry and brittle. This would also ensure that the tree needles and leaves become integrated into the habitat structures.

Disturbed wood harvest sites, access roads, and staging areas are rehabilitated by planting a native grass seed mix.

## Implementation

Implementation will be phased over two years based on available funding, construction specifications, contract requirements, and permitting requirements including established in-water work periods. Depending upon receipt of all permits, initial construction could begin as early as the spring of 2020 with subsequent work likely occurring for approximately two years thereafter depending on project design outcomes, stakeholder support, and project funding. Instream work and side channel work will start in the western end of the project area and progress in sections downstream.

Construction scheduling and sequencing will be developed and implemented to complete major project components in logical segments that can be completed within a given construction season. Construction season may encompass late spring, summer, fall, and winter pending seasonal weather patterns and onsite conditions.

In the event new stream channel segments and other project features (e.g., alcoves, wetlands, ponds, etc.) are constructed but not connected to the existing stream channel network during a given construction season, measures will be incorporated into construction plans and specifications to minimize potential risk of damage and activation during spring high stream flows. Constructed stream channel activation may be completed during designed in-stream work periods (e.g, July 1 to October 15) or during periods outside of designated in-stream work windows following appropriate environmental permitting variance planning and authorization. Typical channel activations that occur during designated instream windows will require flushing with water to mobilize sediment and removal using water pumps to minimize introduction of sediment into active streams that have limited or no background turbidity during summer base flow periods. Once restoration work is completed, rehabilitation and planting of disturbed areas will be completed.

Implementation of the activities in this project will require approximately 2.05 miles of temporary access roads within the project area (Table 1) in order to facilitate equipment and material access to the river segments under construction. All of these miles will be on Forest Service lands. Temporary access roads will be native surface and may have isolated areas of spot rocking if needed. Three temporary river crossings and one temporary bridge will be constructed where needed for equipment access.

**Table 1. Temporary Access Roads.**

<b>Temp Access Rd Number</b>	<b>Miles</b>
T1	0.02
T2	0.15
T2A	0.02
T2B	0.04

Temp Access Rd Number	Miles
T3	0.19
T4	0.04
T5	0.15
T6	0.04
T7	0.05
T8	0.22
T9	0.04
T10	0.02
T11	0.01
T14	0.25
T15	0.46
T16	0.01
T19	<0.01
T20	0.1
T21	0.03
T22	0.09
<b>Total</b>	<b>2.05</b>

Approximately 9 staging areas ranging from less than 1 to 1.43 acres in size will be cleared and used to store materials on site for use during construction (refer to attached Alternative 2 Modified Map for locations). The majority of these areas are less than one half acre in size and will primarily be used to stage large wood material before it is incorporated into instream structures (Table 2). All of these areas are on NFS lands.

**Table 2. Staging Areas**

Storage Area Number	Type	Acres
SA1	Staging Area	0.14
SA2	Staging Area	0.74
SA3	Staging Area	0.97
SA4	Staging Area	2.0
SA5	Staging Area	0.66
SA6	Staging Area	0.39
SA7	Staging Area	0.2
SA9	Staging Area	0.16
SA10	Staging Area	1.43
<b>Total</b>		<b>6.69</b>

Approximately 0.34 miles of bypass channels will be constructed by a track mounted excavator to divert river water while instream work is being completed in the main stem of the river. Approximately 10 temporary coffer dams made of bulk bags filled with native materials (clean sands, gravels, and cobbles) would be installed to keep the water within the bypass channels.

All temporary roads, constructed bypass channels, staging areas and other areas disturbed by equipment will be rehabilitated and re-vegetated with appropriate native potted plants, salvaged vegetation, and seeded with a native grass/forb seed mix after project completion. Mulch will be used in those areas where woody debris is not

available for rehabilitation. All disturbed areas will be rehabilitated in a manner that results in similar or improved conditions relative to pre-project conditions.

As a part of the design of this project approximately 35,000 cubic yards of cut (excavated) material generated during instream enhancement work will be created. Nearly all of this material will be used as fill to abandon or alter the existing river channel and for creating riffle and point bar materials. Disposal of the remaining cubic yards of excess material will be used to extend the berm at the La Grande Gun Club within the project area. This would provide additional protection behind the shooting range. Topsoil would initially be scraped in these areas and then placed on top of fill. Fill locations would be planted and seeded with appropriate native plants and grasses. Approximately 3.09 acres of permanent fill areas (Table 3) have been identified to accommodate this excess material (refer to Appendix A – All Activities Map for locations). 2.76 acres are on USFS lands and the remaining 0.33 acres on other adjacent ownerships and will be addressed in the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) Decision letter and FONSI.

**Table 3. Excess Permanent Fill Areas**

<b>Fill Area Number</b>	<b>USFS Acres</b>	<b>Other Ownership Acres</b>
Gun Club Berm	0.30	0.33
Fill Area	2.1	
Instream Islands	0.36	
Total	2.76	0.33

## **Public Safety**

An area closure on Forest Service lands within the project area boundary (as depicted in the project area map in Appendix A) will be promulgated to restrict public access during project activities in order to provide for public safety. This area closure will be rescinded at the conclusion of all project activities.

## **Mitigations and Monitoring:**

Mitigation measures incorporated as part of this decision include specific treatment design features as well as a variety of specific resource measures described in the Proposed Action and Alternatives section of the EA on pages 16-32. Wallowa-Whitman National Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines that apply to Management Area 3 were also incorporated into project design.

Monitoring of project activities incorporated into this decision is discussed on pages 32 through 35 of the EA.

## **Alternatives**

A range of alternatives to the Proposed Action was considered in this analysis based on public scoping and feedback. The alternatives described below were considered in detail based on the purpose and need of the project and the key issues and public feedback on the Proposed Action as described in the Public Involvement and Tribal Consultation section (EA pages 8-9) of the EA. Forest Service management objectives are incorporated into alternatives by following standards and guidelines of the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest Plan as amended.

### **Alternative 1 - No Action**

This alternative constitutes the "No Action" alternative. Instream enhancement activities, and other management activities identified in the Longley Meadows analysis area will be deferred. This alternative forms a baseline for comparison of the action alternatives.

**Alternative 2 Modified** – [Refer to map attached to this Decision Notice]

This is the preferred alternative as described in the EA and under The Decision above.

**Table 4. Summary of Alternative Restoration Changes Under The Decision for the Longley Meadows Project.**

Alternative Elements		Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 2 Modified
Restoration Activities				
Channel Realignment/Changes	Dewatering and Fish Rescue Channels (miles)	0	0.74	0.45
	Excess Permanent Fill Areas (acres)*	0	0.58	3.07
	Channel Realignment (acres)	0	8.26	5.67
	Main Channel (miles)*	1.5	1.69	2.11
	Side Channels (miles)*	1.08	2.39	1.75
Temporary Access Roads and Staging Areas	Staging Areas (acres)*	0	10.78	6.69
	Temporary Access Roads (miles)*	0	1.65	2.05
	Number of Staging Areas	0	10	9

### Scoping Process

The USFS and BPA consulted and involved the following individuals, Federal, State, tribal, and local agencies during the development of this EA:

The Longley Meadows Fish Habitat Enhancement project was published in the Wallowa-Whitman Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA), a quarterly publication, in October 2018 and has appeared in each quarterly SOPA since then. This mailing is distributed to a mailing list of individuals, organizations, and agencies and is published on the Forest's web page at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=54798>.

The project was included in the government-to-government consultation in the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest 2019 program of work presentation to the CTUIR Board of Trustees in July 2019. Scoping and consultation for the project is ongoing with the CTUIR.

Scoping and consultation with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) was initiated in 2018 and has been ongoing throughout this project.

The USFS and BPA sent a letter inviting comments from interested forest users and concerned publics which directed them to a detailed description of the proposed action on Forest Service and BPA websites. This letter was mailed on December 14, 2018 to approximately 100 individuals, groups, agencies, and organizations soliciting comments and concerns related to this project. Four individuals/ organizations/ agencies expressed interest in the Longley project. One commenter suggested giving the funds needed to implement the Longley Meadows project directly to tribal members to do the project if that is their priority. Oregon Department of Transportation pointed out that if access is needed beyond what is currently permitted from Hwy 244 then additional permits would need to be acquired. One commenter requested that studies/monitoring from the Bird Track Springs project be applied to the effects analysis of the Longley Meadows project. A final commenter advocated for measures to avoid/minimize negative impacts, use of best management practices, application of lessons learned from the Bird Track Springs project, and use of native species.

The preliminary EA was released on August 21, 2019 for a 30-day public comment period. Two comment letters were received during that period. One reiterated the request to use best management practices, utilization of the studies/monitoring from the Bird Track Springs project, and the use of native species in restoration efforts. The other commenter indicated that BPA funding should be used to deal directly with the effects around the hydroelectric dam facilities and not in headwater rivers and streams where other factors were most likely the reason for poor habitat conditions. Response to these comments can be found in Appendix E of the EA.

The Bureau of Reclamation initiated consultation in compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) Section 106 consultation with the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and CTUIR in November 2017. BPA **has completed** consultation with SHPO and CTUIR regarding potential project impacts.

Consultation with National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and US Fish and Wildlife Service (USF&WS) for threatened and endangered species **has been completed** for this project through the latest version of the BPA Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) programmatic agreement.

An analysis file for this project is available for public review at the La Grande Ranger District. The analysis file includes specialists' reports, data specific to the project, public notifications and their responses, meeting notes, and miscellaneous documentation.

## **Reasons for Decision**

I have chosen to implement Alternative 2 modified because it provides a balanced response to the issues and concerns raised in this project while best achieving stated purpose and need objectives aimed at improving instream aquatic habitat, enhancing riparian habitat, and addressing winter ice issues. This project moves habitat conditions toward the desired future conditions outlined in the amended forest plan benefiting ESA-listed fish species and other resident aquatic organisms. The reasons for this decision follow:

### **Water Quality**

While water quality would experience short-term erosion and sedimentation impacts during construction and channel rewatering, conservation measures implemented during construction activities would limit the magnitude and duration of water quality impacts. Changes in the side and main channel lengths (increase of 6,799 feet), sinuosity (an increase of 0.11), slope (a 0.02 percent decrease), and floodplain connections would result in slower velocity flows through the reach, increased ponding, and improved shallow and deep groundwater infiltration. The increased frequency of floodplain inundation would result in deposition of additional sediment and soils, increased moisture retention, and increased vegetation establishment.

Stream temperature is expected to decrease incrementally under Alternative 2 modified as a result of increased stream bank stabilization, reduced channel over-widening (width-to-depth ratio), protecting and increasing riparian vegetation and increasing stream shade in the long term. In addition, reconnecting the channel to its floodplain will increase floodplain inundation frequency. As the floodplain absorbs water and saturates, underlying aquifers would recharge helping buffer against stream channel warming. This cold water would then be discharged to the stream during base flow periods when the highest stream temperatures occur. This would have the potential to buffer extremes in water temperature.

Alternative 2 modified will increase floodplain connectivity to the GRR increasing the flooded area affected by 57% (5-year flood). Increased inundation from peak flows will enhance groundwater recharge, sustain riparian vegetation, increase net deposition of fine sediment, and provide for dissipation of ice jams. Overall, floodplain function and quality would increase, especially once floodplain vegetation becomes established.

Alternative 2 modified will replace wetlands impacted during project activities and create new riverine wetlands along the new channel. Enhanced floodplain connectivity and increase in the frequency and the



size of the area flooded, are expected to result in a net increase in quantity of wetlands acreage. Enhancing floodplain connectivity and increasing the frequency and the size of the area flooded by the 10-year event by almost double would enhance the natural wetland function and formation process within the GRR floodplain. These indirect beneficial impacts could include additional mechanical and chemical filtration, bank and floodplain stability, energy reduction and dissipation, and increase in wetland value because of increased connectivity to the floodplain and use by aquatic and terrestrial wildlife.

Long term, water quality at a local scale will be improved due to decreased erosion and sediment input into the channel. As the new channel (including channel braids and side channels) captures water at high flows and wood structures force water laterally onto the floodplain, existing stream bank stability is expected to increase. Bank-protection materials such as large wood complexes and eventually mature riparian vegetation will continue to increase streambank stability over the long term.

Long term, enhancing floodplain connectivity, reducing channel width to depth ratios, increasing the frequency and size of the area flooded, and enhancing wetland function will be beneficial to water quality in the area.

### **Fish Habitat**

Implementation of Alternative 2 modified will improve fish habitat within the project area restoring the reach to proper functioning condition over the long term.

Improvements to water temperature will directly improve fish habitat. Water temperature buffering reduces salmonid stress particularly in the summer and winter months; fluctuations in water temperature or permanent shifts in water temperature regimes have likely caused this stream reach to be unusable for native fish species, particularly at certain life stages. Restoration of shallow ground water connections with the stream and floodplain will improve habitat and usability for aquatic species in both the channel and streambed.

Incorporating existing cool water sources and improving exchange and capture of water will aid in moderating stream temperatures. In addition, creation of beaver dam analogs will result in increased deep slow velocity habitat where the water column has vertical temperature stratification providing stable and highly suitable overwintering habitat for juvenile salmonids.

Reintroduction of large wood structure (LWM) to the project reach (97% increase over existing condition) will improve stream connections with surrounding aquifers, restore complex streambed topography through increasing pool/riffle sequences, encourage gravel bar development and improve subsurface flows. These changes will have moderate to major beneficial effects to fish and aquatic species and habitat within the project area.

LWM plays a crucial role in the survival and abundance of juvenile salmon. Key pieces per mile would increase from the current level of 0 to 186/mile. LWM installed into the banks are expected to increase bank stability and reduce chronic sediment inputs from eroding banks. Rehabilitation of eroding banks will provide long-term benefits to fish and aquatic habitat by reducing fine sediment inputs. Benefits to adult and juvenile salmonids and habitat from the addition of large wood under Alternative 2 modified include increased channel complexity, increased cover for protection, increased pool frequency and quality, improved off-channel habitat, increased frequency of inundation of water on the floodplain and retention of organic materials.

The increase in wood forced large scour pools would have the potential to directly and indirectly benefit all species and life stages of fish. These pools will provide low velocity resting habitat, cover from predators, and depth that provides cooler temperatures through vertical stratification in the summer and more stable temperatures in the winter (particularly low velocity pools with warmer groundwater and/or subsurface river water) when surface ice occurs. In addition, the increase in large pool habitat would indirectly increase foraging efficiency for juvenile and resident fish at certain life stages. In Alternative 2 modified, approximately 21 major pools will be constructed in the main stem and larger side channels

(14/mile). Approximately 18 additional pools will be constructed in the smaller side channels and alcove features. Increasing pool frequency, pool quality and large pools in the existing and realigned channel would have long term, beneficial direct and indirect effects on fish and aquatic habitat in the project area.

Habitat restoration efforts under Alternative 2 modified also focus on stabilizing overwintering habitats (such as side-channels, alcoves, backwaters, and beaver ponds) which are especially important during meteorological conditions such as rain on snow events and ice dam break up that cause flooding.

Alternative 2 modified will improve instream and riparian habitat for all aquatic species, including those listed as threatened and endangered under the Endangered Species Act. These improvements will contribute to the long term restoration goals for the endangered species and their habitat within this project area.

### **Cultural Resources and Traditional Cultural Uses**

The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) expressed concerns over potential impacts to cultural resources and traditional cultural properties. Cultural surveys and associated reports completed for this project were shared with the tribes and included discussions of important traditional cultural uses including key First Foods important to the CTUIR. Project design avoids all known cultural resource locations and provides measures to protect any sites possibly discovered during project implementation.

The decision to implement Alternative 2 modified retains and improves access to the area maintaining opportunities for tribal members to practice traditional uses and implements activities to improve to water quality and fish habitat – resources that are highly valued by the Tribes. Specifically, the improvements to water quality and fish habitat will enhance First Foods opportunities important to the CTUIR and restoration of habitat for endangered steelhead and Chinook salmon important to the Nez Perce Tribe and CTUIR alike.

### **Protection of Adjacent State and Private Lands/Infrastructure**

Alternative 2 modified is designed to have short term stability (i.e. approximately 10-15 years) utilizing numerous engineered log jams (ELJs) and bank protection features to provide initial horizontal channel and bank stability along with constructed riffles of specific gradation using local river rock sources to provide vertical channel stability. These elements have been engineered to be stable through anticipated flood events. Previous projects of this scale in the region have shown that these types of elements are stable up to, and within, extreme flood events.

While some of these ELJ elements may deform and shed individual pieces of wood over time, these mobile pieces of wood will typically be caught by downstream project elements and remain within the project area. Individual logs may occasionally travel downstream of the project area in a similar manner as currently occurs under natural conditions. Logs used in the project would be a maximum of 20-40 feet long and would not be tethered with any non-natural fasteners and are therefore similar to what currently moves through this reach during flood events.

Some erosion is expected to occur and is planned for in the design to maintain a natural, balanced supply of sediment in the project reach. Monitoring of several similar scale projects in comparable environments have all shown minimal immediate erosion or instability issues using these techniques. Long-term stability is provided for by healthy riparian vegetation. Riparian vegetation improvement is expected from floodplain restoration and associated hydrology, extensive seeding, plantings and natural recruitment through improved floodplain processes. Alternative 2 modified has been designed to retain as much existing vegetation (trees, wetlands, and shrubs) as possible, while reestablishing disturbed vegetation through extensive soil treatment, salvage, and replanting efforts.

Hydraulic modeling was used to modify Alternative 2 modified design to ensure that it will not exacerbate potential flooding of adjacent properties/structures in comparison to existing conditions. Improved

floodplain interaction may reduce flood potential downstream during smaller high water/flood events. No project elements were designed or constructed on Bear Creek Ranch (BCR) during the Bird Track Springs (BTS) project and none are proposed under Longley Meadows. Other project elements (e.g., side channels) that are designed to provide additional floodplain interaction are routed back to the mainstem Grande Ronde below BCR. These side channels would likely remove pressure from the actively eroding banks on BCR by routing flow through the channels and floodplain away from BCR.

The historical railroad grade that currently provides floodplain protection to parts of BCR and Highway 244 would remain intact within this area and continue to provide protection. Modeling results show nearly identical flood patterns in areas downstream of the proposed project for a 100-year flood event compared to existing conditions. Any future changes to flood patterns within BCR and the La Grande Rifle Club lands would most likely be dependent upon physical changes that may or may not occur regardless of project actions.

Monitoring of the partially-constructed BTS project during the 25-year event during spring 2019 confirmed that ELJ design successfully retained large woody debris in place throughout the event. Some smaller materials were loosened; however, many were caught in and retained in ELJs downstream from where the materials originated. During this event, several trees/woody debris that that originated upstream of the BTS project area were retained on constructed project elements that would likely have traveled further downstream.

In review of these consequences, Alternative 2 modified best meets the purpose and need while mitigating impacts to soils, water quality and fisheries, threatened and endangered species, cultural resources, noxious weeds, wildlife, visual resources, recreation, tribal treaty rights, adjacent private lands, and public safety. Alternative 2 modified integrates the purpose and need of the project, meets the legal requirements of National Forest Management Act, responds to downstream landowner concerns, meets forest plan direction, and protects resources within the project area. (EA, pages 37-150)

#### **Other Issues:**

Further consideration of the environmental consequences of other issues is disclosed in the EA on pages 37-152 and in the response to public comments in Appendix E of the EA.

**In summary**, my decision to select Alternative 2 modified is based on thoughtful consideration of the public input, ecological conditions of the landscape, predicted environmental effects, and long-term improvement of fish and riparian habitat and water quality for endangered and other aquatic species within the project area.

#### **Findings**

The Longley Meadows Fish Habitat Enhancement Project was developed in accordance with the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act, as amended by the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) and its implementation regulations codified at Title 36, Part 219 of the Code of Federal Regulations. It also was developed in accordance with Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (Code of Federal Regulations, Title 40, Part 1508.27). These implementation regulations require specific findings to support decisions subject to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). These findings include (1) Finding of No Significant Impact and (2) Finding of Consistency with Management Direction for the Forest Plan.

#### ***Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)***

As the responsible official, I am responsible for evaluating the effects of the project relative to the definition of significance established by the CEQ Regulations (40 CFR 1508.13). I have reviewed and considered the EA and documentation included in the project record, and I have determined that the proposed action and alternatives will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. As a result, no environmental impact statement will be prepared. My rationale for this finding is as follows, organized by sub-section of the CEQ definition of significance cited above.

## Context

For the proposed action and no action alternative, the context of the environmental effects is based on the environmental analysis in the EA.

## Intensity

Intensity is a measure of the severity, extent, or quantity of effects, and is based on information from the effects analysis of the EA and the references in the project record. The effects of this project have been appropriately and thoroughly considered with an analysis that is responsive to concerns and issues raised by the public. The agency has taken a hard look at the environmental effects using relevant scientific information and knowledge of site-specific conditions gained from field visits. My finding of no significant impact is based on the context of the project and intensity of effects using the ten factors identified in 40 CFR 1508.27(b).

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on balance the effect will be beneficial.

Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse are discussed in the environmental analysis section of the EA. These impacts are within the range of those identified in the Forest Plan. The actions will not have significant impacts on other resources identified and described in this analysis. The effect of the decision is non-significant in the long and short term.

2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.

Public health and safety will be minimally affected over a short term by the proposed project. Short-term safety hazards such as truck traffic and heavy equipment on and near roads will be mitigated through contract safety provisions (EA, pp. 16, 148) and an area closure on Forest Service lands within the project area during construction activities. Improved floodplain function and connectivity is anticipated to reduce potential impacts on the adjacent state highway and safety of users through improved capture and storage of ice during ice flow events.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as the proximity to historical or cultural resources, parklands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

This project proposal does not affect any unique geographical characteristics such as parklands, prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas (EA, p. 148-150). **Impacts on cultural resources have been assessed and consulted on with relevant tribes and SHPO.**

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

Based on the analysis of the effects of implementing this project no substantial scientific evidence exists to dispute the size, nature, or effects of this project on any human environmental factors. Results from public scoping and consultation with tribes have not identified highly controversial concerns or issues associated with this decision (EA, Environmental Impacts section).

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

There are no known effects on the human environment that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks associated with this project. Instream enhancement, planting, floodplain enhancement, and channel realignment are common practices and the effects are well known. The EA effectively addresses and analyzes issues and environmental impacts associated with the project (EA, Environmental Impacts section).

These actions pose no disproportionately high or adverse human health or environmental effects, including social and economic effects, on minority or low-income populations. **Consistent with the federal government's overall trust responsibility to Indian tribes where treaty or other legally defined rights apply to National Forest System lands, the forest has consulted and continues to consult with**

tribes on this project. Consultation resulted in tribal comments and contributions that were incorporated into the proposed action. Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) was provided copies of the proposed action and heritage reports. The CTUIR specialists and Board of Trustees also received several briefings on this project during formal consultation meetings in 2018 - 2019. Discussions and input received from tribal archaeologists have been incorporated into project design. (EA, pp. 131-140, 148).

6. The degree to which the action may establish precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

These actions do not set a precedent for other projects that may be implemented to meet the goals and objectives of the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. The Forest Plan, as amended has set goals of protecting and enhancing riparian and fisheries habitat. This project does not change or amend the forest plan. (EA, pp. 11-33)

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. Significance exists if it is reasonable to anticipate a cumulatively significant impact on the environment. Significance cannot be avoided by terming an action temporary or by breaking it down into small component parts.

There are no known significant adverse, cumulative, or secondary effects between this project and other projects (completed, active, or planned) within or adjacent to the affected area. Effects to the basic resource values of soil, water, vegetation, air, or fish and wildlife were evaluated and determined to be localized and limited (EA, pp. 37-150). This determination is based on the results of cumulative effects analyses discussed in the EA and in Appendix D that considered on-going and proposed activities.

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

Based on a cultural resource inventory and report, mitigation and protection measures, the known cultural, scientific, or historical resources within the project area have been protected during project design (EA, pp. 131-140). Field studies have been completed for cultural and historic resources (Heritage Report, analysis file). The contract will contain a contract clause requiring protection of any newly detected sites. Consultation with potentially affected tribes and SHPO has been on-going and has not identified any adverse effects to significant scientific, cultural or historic resources.

9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

A biological evaluation for wildlife proposed, endangered, threatened, and sensitive (PETS) species indicates that this project received a "may impact individuals or habitat but will not likely contribute to a trend towards federal listing or cause a loss of viability to the population or species for "sensitive" Northern bald eagle, Suckley Cuckoo bumblebee, and western bumblebee. A beneficial impact determination was determined for sensitive PETS species Columbia spotted frog and Lewis' woodpecker. Canada Lynx received a "no effect" determination. (Wildlife Biological Evaluation, Analysis File)

The biological evaluation for fish species indicates that this project is likely to adversely affect for all three ESA listed fish (Snake River steelhead, Snake River spring/summer Chinook salmon, Columbia River bull trout) and their designated critical habitat due to short term disturbance, sedimentation, and turbidity. NMFS concurred with this finding in their Letter of Concurrence (LOC), dated XXXXXX, 2019 and US Fish and Wildlife Services' LOC dated XXXXXX, 2019 (Analysis File). No terms and conditions were provided.

Implementation of the Longley Meadows project may impact individuals or habitat for sensitive aquatic species (Redband trout, Pacific lamprey, western ridged mussels, Columbia Pebblesnail, shortfaced lanx, and California floater), but will not likely contribute to a trend towards federal listing or

cause a loss of viability to the population or species. A beneficial impact is anticipated long term for Redband trout, Pacific lamprey, and western ridged mussels (EA pp. 103-109).

The biological evaluation for PETS Plants indicates that project activities may impact individuals or habitat of ten sensitive plant species (7 species of moonwort, mountain grape-fern, Cordilleran sedge, and dwarf phacelia) but will not likely contribute to a trend toward federal listing or cause a loss of viability to the population or species. There will be no impact on three species (Clustered lady's slipper, Bolander's spikerush, and ground cedar) which may have potential habitat within the project area. (EA pp. 101-103)

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. The actions proposed in this project focus on protecting and enhancing the environment by enhancing instream habitat, providing fish passage, and enhancing floodplain connectivity and sustainability (EA, Environmental Impacts pp. 37-150). This decision is consistent with relevant Federal, State and local laws and requirements.

### ***Finding of Consistency with Forest Plan Management Direction***

From the results of site-specific analysis documented in the EA, I conclude that this action is consistent with the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended (EA, Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action and Alternatives section).

### **Pre-decisional Administrative Project Review**

As provided by the Pre-decisional Administrative Review process under 36 CFR 218 Subpart A for Forest Service proposed actions implementing land and resource management plan activities documented with a Record of Decision or Decision Notice, legal notice of the objection process was published in the Observer newspaper on November XX, 2019. The 45-day objection period ended on December XX, 2019. XXXX # of objections were received.

- As allowed under 36 CFR 218.11(a), the objections were resolved during a meeting with the objectors and subsequently withdrawn by the objectors.

OR

- As required by 36 CFR 218.11(b)(1), the objections were considered and responded to by the Reviewing Officer on XXXXXXXX XX, 2020. No further review from any other Forest Service or USDA official and the reviewing officers written response to an objection is available (36 CFR 218.11(b)(2).

OR

- As allowed under 36 CFR 218.12(c)(2) when no objection is filed within the objection filing period, the Responsible Official may sign this decision notice on the fifth business day following the end of the objection filing period.

### **Implementation**

This project may be implemented immediately upon signature of this decision notice.

For further information, contact Sarah Brandy, Project Specialist, at the La Grande District, 3502 Highway 30, La Grande, Oregon 97850, or telephone (541) 962-8590.

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Bill Gamble  
District Ranger  
La Grande Ranger District

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Date

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